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For Immediate Release

October 15, 2003

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The Prague Declaration

“Towards an Information Literate Society”

Inequities among nations and individuals in today’s Information Society were targeted at a historic, first-of-its-kind meeting in Prague, The Czech Republic, September 20-23, 2003. Forty participants from 23 different countries, representing all seven major geographic regions of the world, met to discuss Information Literacy. With the support of UNESCO, and organized by the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) and the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL), participants wrestled with the fundamental challenge of how to empower people to benefit from existing information and communication resources and technologies in an Internet Age.

To date, advancements in information and communication technologies have only increased the divide between the information rich and the information poor. Prague participants acknowledged the need for three elements to improve this situation: 1) ready access to information and communication technologies; 2) unrestricted availability of needed information; and 3) an information literate citizenry. They agreed that an information literacy citizenry is required to mobilize an effective civil society and create a competitive workforce.

Information Literacy was defined as the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address an issue or problem.

Participants declared Information Literacy is a basic human right to life long learning. Shigeru Aoyagi, Chief, Division of Basic Education, UNESCO, stated that: “For all societies, Information Literacy is becoming an increasingly important component of not only literacy policies and strategies, but also of global policies to promote human development.” Former Finnish Parliament member Mirja Ryynanen urged participants to tell stories and use emotion in approaching policy makers to explain and justify peoples’ right to be information literate.

Information Literacy is a prerequisite for participating effectively in an Information Society. The creation of an Information Society is key to social, cultural, and economic development of nations and communities, institutions and individuals in the 21st century and beyond. NCLIS consultant Woody Horton summarized these concerns by saying, “In our emerging Information Society, information itself is becoming the strategic transforming resource of society...This is the reason why Information Literacy is so important, because, without it, the Information Society will never be able to rise to its full potential and will remain, instead, only an unrealized dream.”

Participants issued “The Prague Declaration: Toward an Information Literate Society” (attached). They further recommended that progress in, and opportunities for implementation of the meeting recommendations should be assessed by an International Congress on Information Literacy in the first half of 2005, and that the possibility of inclusion of Information Literacy within the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) should be considered by the international community.

Over 30 papers were commissioned for the Prague meeting by the author-participants, and served as a basis for the discussions. Both abstracts and the full papers are available at <http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/infolitconf&meet.html>

The full report of the Prague meeting, with a complete set recommendations, will be available in December 2003. Further information and requests for a copy of the report can be made to the above contacts.

The National Forum on Information Literacy is an umbrella group of over 90 organizations from education, business, government, and community service--plus more recently some international organizations. All are committed to the empowerment of individuals in today's information society. Combined membership in Forum member organizations totals over 5,000,000. For more information go to www.infolit.org.

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